IP/03/1210

Brussels, 5 September 2003

A use-by date for cosmetic products: the Commission adopts a symbol that will ensure consumers are better informed

There should be no more doubts about whether or not to use that opened tube of sun-cream you found at the back of a cupboard or the mascara in the bottom of your handbag. The European Commission has today adopted a symbol which, as from 11 March 2005, must be displayed on all cosmetic products with a durability of more than 30 months. The symbol depicts an open cream jar and is accompanied by an indication in months or years of how long the product will remain suitable for use once it has been opened.

As European Commissioner Erkki Liikanen put it: "Thanks to this new symbol, European consumers will have a greater assurance that they have bought a safe product, plus a guarantee of its quality. This measure comes in addition to the labelling obligations already in place and provides consumers with a greater depth of information about the cosmetic products they are using".

The symbol will be particularly useful on products which, once opened, come into contact with the outside environment and are thus liable to degrade and become harmful, e.g. as a result of microbiological contamination. A symbol was the preferred option because it makes for rapid identification, whereas a written explanation can involve complications (need for translation, lack of space on packaging that often tends to be very small). The Commission has been working with the cosmetics industry and the relevant authorities of the Member States to ensure that the message behind the logo's design comes immediately across to the consumer. The adoption of the symbol is the first consequence of the Directive adopted last February by the Council and the European Parliament amending legislation on cosmetic products (see IP/03/55).

As from 11 March 2005, this symbol will have to be displayed on all cosmetic products with a durability of more than 30 months. Hitherto, there was no legal obligation whatsoever for durability to be indicated on such products. For other cosmetic products, i.e. those with a durability of less than 30 months, there was already a legal obligation to indicate the date of minimum durability - the date until which the product, stored under appropriate conditions, continues to fulfil its initial function and, in particular, remains safe for human health.